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# BATTLE DROP



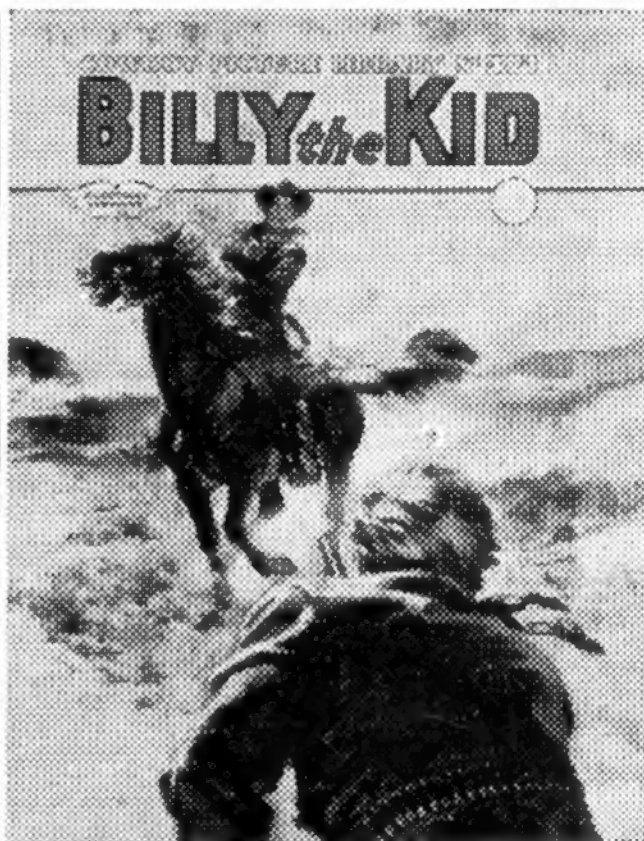


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# BATTLE DROP

THEY WERE MOVING FORWARD IN SMALL, SPACED-OUT GROUPS AS THEY HAD LEARNED TO DO ON TRAINING EXERCISES IN ENGLAND. ONLY, THIS WAS NOT ENGLAND, AND THIS WAS NO EXERCISE BUT THE REAL THING — ITALY, 1943, AND THE BATTALION'S FIRST TIME IN ACTION...



*Chapter 1***THE SURVIVOR**

IT WAS STRANGELY QUIET EXCEPT FOR THE WHINE OF BRITISH SHELLS OVERHEAD AND THE FOLLOWING CRUMP AS THEY BURST ON THE RIDGE THAT WAS THE BATTALION'S OBJECTIVE.



ON THE RIDGE, GREY-CLAD FIGURES CROUCHED IN SLIT TRENCHES AND WEAPON PITS, HEADS DOWN UNDER THE POUNDING OF THE BRITISH ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT, THEY WERE GRIMLY BIDDING THEIR TIME ...





THE GERMANS HAD POURED TROOPS SOUTHWARD IN AN EFFORT TO CONTAIN THE ADVANCE OF BRITISH AND ALLIED ARMIES UP THE LEG OF ITALY. THIS RIDGE WAS A VITAL SECTOR IN THE BOCHE DEFENSIVE LINE. ON ITS REVERSE SLOPE, MORTARMEN AWAITED THE ORDER TO FIRE . . .



THE BRITISH BARRAGE LIFTED. IT HAD INFLICTED HEAVY CASUALTIES ON THE ENEMY. YET SUDDENLY THE RIDGE WAS ALIVE WITH SPURTS OF FLAME THAT STABBED WICKEDLY THROUGH THE DRIFTING SMOKE . . .



## Battle Drop

RIFLE BULLETS CRACKED AMONGST THE ATTACKING INFANTRY. MACHINE-GUNS SPRAYED THEM, STUTTERING OUT THEIR VICIOUS MESSAGE OF DEATH. SALVOES OF MORTAR BOMBS WHISTLED OVER THE RIDGE AND BURST SHATTERINGLY.



WITH SUPERB DISCIPLINE AND A TENACITY WORTHY OF VETERANS, THE MEN OF THE BRITISH INFANTRY BATTALION PUSHED FORWARD RESOLUTELY. THERE WAS ONLY ONE WHO BROKE UNDER THE IMPACT OF THAT CRUEL BAPTISM OF FIRE...



## Battle Drop

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HIS SECTION LEADER, CORPORAL BENNETT, SAW HIM DIVE ABJECTLY FOR COVER...



KANE'S REACTION HAD COME AS NO SURPRISE TO BENNETT AND THE OTHERS. THEY HAD WONDERED HOW THEY THEMSELVES WOULD STAND UP TO BATTLE, BUT HAD NEVER DOUBTED MATT KANE WOULD CRACK...





# Battle Drop

THEY WERE THE LAST WORDS BENNETT EVER SPOKE, RAKING THROUGH THE SMOKE-HAZED AIR, A LONG BURST FROM A SPANDAUS CYTHED DOWN THE WHOLE SECTION — EXCEPT FOR THE HIDDEN KANE ...



AND THEN GERMAN ARTILLERY BLANKETED THE APPROACH TO THE RIDGE WITH SHELLS. THE GROUND ERUPTED FLAME. SEARING METAL RIPPED INTO THE ADVANCING INFANTRY. THE ATTACK WAS HALTED ...





BUT LEVEN CAME SQUIRMING INTO THE HOLLOW AT THAT MOMENT. HE SPOKE BREATHLESSLY TO HIS OFFICER, MAJOR CONNELL, OFFICER COMMANDING DON COMPANY . . .

WELL, LEVEN, HOW IS IT WITH THE LEADING PLATOONS ?

SIXTEEN PLATOON'S DOWN TO A SECTION IN STRENGTH, SIR. EIGHTEEN PLATOON'S CAUGHT AN EVEN WORSE PACKET. NOT A MAN LEFT ALIVE !

MAJOR CONNELL'S RUNNER WAS WRONG. ONE MAN IN EIGHTEEN PLATOON WAS STILL ALIVE — MATT KANE . . .



## Battle Drop

KANE DID NOT SEE A FIGURE MAKING FOR THE GERMAN WIRE IN A SERIES OF SHORT DASHES... A SURVIVOR FROM SIXTEEN PLATOON, SAUNDERS BY NAME...



UNSCATHED BY THE SHELL THAT HAD BURST IN FRONT OF HIM, SAUNDERS PICKED HIMSELF UP. THEN HE SAW HE WAS NOT ALONE...



KANE! LISTEN, THERE'S A NEST OF JERRIES UP AHEAD WITH AN M.G. THAT WIPED OUT MY PALS! THEY'RE GOING TO PAY FOR THAT, AND YOU CAN HELP ME SEE THEY DO!

SAUNDERS WAS FIGHTING MAD, BERSERK WITH MINGLED GRIEF AND RAGE. HE MOTIONED THROUGH THE SMOKE TO A GAP BLOWN IN THE GERMAN WIRE...



GRAB THAT BREN AND FOLLOW ME! BE READY TO GIVE ME COVERING FIRE WHILE I WORK CLOSE ENOUGH TO LOB THIS GRENADE!

NO! NO, SAUNDERS... I—I'M STAYING WHERE I AM!



## Battle Drop

FOR THE FIRST TIME SAUNDERS REALISED KANE WAS SHAKING WITH FEAR. IN OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES HE MIGHT HAVE SYMPATHISED. BUT NOW HE WAS INFURIATED...



KANE'S ONLY RESPONSE WAS A WHIMPERING PROTEST. IT INCENSED SAUNDERS. HE USED FORCE, RUTHLESSLY, EFFECTIVELY...



## Battle Drop

THRUSTING, HEAVING, HE DROVE THE TERRIFIED MAN OUT INTO THE OPEN - THROUGH THE SWIRLING FOG OF BATTLE TO THE GAP IN THE WIRE . . .



ALL AT ONCE THEY SAW THE ENEMY MACHINE-GUNNERS THROUGH A BREAK IN THE SMOKE-HAZE. IN THE SAME INSTANT THE GERMANS BECAME AWARE OF SAUNDERS AND KANE . . .





IT WAS THEN THAT KANE SHOULD HAVE CUT LOOSE WITH THE BREN, BUT HE WAS PETRIFIED. CURSING HIM, SAUNDERS DREW THE PIN FROM THE GRENADE AND MADE HIS THROW . . .

LET 'EM HAVE IT, KANE! THE BREN, YOU FOOL—



EVEN AS BULLETS FROM THE GERMAN M.G. LASHED INTO SAUNDERS, THE GRENADE LEFT HIS HAND. IT STRUCK THE EDGE OF THE WEAPON PIT, DROPPED IN AND BURST WITH A JAGGED FLASH AND AN EAR-SPLITTING CRACK . . .



## Battle Drop

A SPLIT-SECOND AFTER THE GRENADE EXPLODED, A SHELL SCREAMED THROUGH THE AIR AND CRASHED BEHIND THE TWO ENGLISHMEN. SAUNDERS VANISHED IN ITS LURID BLAST. KANE WAS LIFTED BY THE SHOCK-WAVE AND HURLED FORWARD . . .



FOR SEVERAL MINUTES KANE LAY STUNNED. THEN, AS CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNED, HE REALISED THE ARTILLERY FIRE HAD EASED OFF. AT THE SAME TIME HE WAS AWARE OF MEN MOVING AROUND HIM, THE REMNANTS OF SIXTEEN PLATOON . . .





SICKENING WAVES OF PAIN SWEEPED THROUGH KANE. HE HAD NO CLEAR IMPRESSION OF WHAT FOLLOWED. BUT SOON MEN OF SEVENTEEN PLATOON, HELD IN RESERVE, WERE SWARMING UP THE SLOPE IN SUPPORT . . .



THE PENETRATION MADE AS A RESULT OF SAUNDERS' INITIATIVE AND COURAGE ENABLED THE REST OF THE BATTALION TO RESUME THE ADVANCE. THERE WAS FIERCE HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING ON THE RIDGE . . .



THE OBJECTIVE WAS TAKEN. THEN DOWN CAME THE GERMAN ARTILLERY FIRE AGAIN. MATT KANE, LYING WHERE HE HAD FALLEN, BECKONED FEEBLY AS HE SAW TWO STRETCHER BEARERS...

I COULDN'T SEE CLEARLY. BUT SUDDENLY I NOTICED KANE LEADING SAUNDERS THROUGH THE WIRE. THE SMOKE SWALLOWED THEM. THEN THE MACHINE-GUN THAT HAD BEEN HAMMERING AT US STOPPED FIRING...



MAJOR CONNELL AND THE LIEUTENANT WHO HAD BEEN SAUNDERS' PLATOON COMMANDER JOINED THE STRETCHER BEARERS AS THEY WERE LIFTING MATT KANE...

GENTLY NOW - GENTLY. THAT'S A BADLY WOUNDED MAN YOU'RE HANDLING - AND A BRAVE ONE.



IN THE EYES OF THE TWO OFFICERS, KANE HAD DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF NOTABLY. THEY WERE TO GO ON BELIEVING THAT, FOR NO ONE WHO HAD WITNESSED MATT KANE'S TERROR WAS LEFT ALIVE TO TELL OF IT...

I'D NEVER HAVE BELIEVED KANE HAD IT IN HIM TO DO WHAT HE DID. IT SHOWS HOW WRONG I WAS IN MY JUDGMENT. BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO SAUNDERS?

HE'S OVER THERE - KILLED, I'M AFRAID. I ONLY HOPE KANE PULLS THROUGH ALL RIGHT.





KANE RECOVERED, SLOWLY, PAINFULLY, AFTER LONG MONTHS IN HOSPITAL - FIRST IN ITALY, THEN IN ENGLAND, WHERE THE STORY OF HIS SUPPOSED ACT OF BRAVERY FOLLOWED HIM . . .

AND HOW'S OUR YOUNG HERO TODAY? ARE YOU BEING WELL LOOKED AFTER? I HAD ANOTHER LETTER FROM YOUR OLD COMPANY COMMANDER THIS MORNING. HE'S TAKING A SPECIAL INTEREST IN YOUR PROGRESS, KANE.

HE IS? THAT'S A CHANGE. ONCE THE ONLY NOTICE HE TOOK OF ME WAS WHEN HE TORE ME OFF A STRIP.



IT WAS NOT TILL JUNE, 1944, ON THE DAY THE ALLIES BLAZED THEIR WAY ACROSS THE NORMANDY BEACHES, THAT MATT KANE REPORTED AT HIS DEPOT IN AN ENGLISH COUNTY TOWN. THERE HE RENEWED ACQUAINTANCE WITH AN AWE-INSPIRING PERSONAGE, THE REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJOR . . .

THEN MATT KANE SAW SOMETHING THAT WAS A RARITY INDEED. A WARM SMILE ACTUALLY APPEARED ON THE FACE OF THE R.S.M., DISPELLING ITS FIERCE SEVERITY . . .

JUST MY IDEA OF A JOKE, LAD. IF YOU LOOK AT ORDERS YOU'LL SEE YOU'VE BEEN PROMOTED. CONGRATULATIONS - CORPORAL, KANE. YOU'RE A CREDIT TO THE REGIMENT. NOW DOUBLE OFF AND GET THOSE TAPES UP!

KANE, YOU'RE IMPROPERLY DRESSED!

IM-IMPROPERLY DRESSED, SIR?



## Chapter 2 AIRBORNE POSTING

LIFE TOOK ON A NEW ASPECT. KANE HAD BEEN A NONENTITY, TREATED WITH SCANT RESPECT, OFTEN WITH CONTEMPT. NOW HIS STOCK WAS HIGH, AND HE BASKED IN HIS FALSE AURA OF RENOWN.



IT WAS A CUSHY EXISTENCE TOO, INSTRUCTING RECRUITS AT THE DEPOT. BUT ONE DAY HE AND TWO LANCE-CORPORALS WHO HAD SEEN ACTION IN ITALY WERE SUMMONED TO THE COLONEL'S OFFICE . . .



THE COLONEL WENT ON TO EXPLAIN THAT THE AIRBORNE FORCES WERE CALLING FOR MEN TO BRING THEM UP TO FULL STRENGTH. MEN WITH BATTLE EXPERIENCE AND GOOD RECORDS...

IF, HOWEVER, YOU PREFER TO REMAIN WITH THE REGIMENT, OUR SECOND BATTALION NOW IN NORMANDY IS ALSO IN NEED OF MEN.

NORMANDY! HEAVY FIGHTING'S GOING ON THERE! IF I DON'T VOLUNTEER FOR THE PARACHUTISTS...



MATT KANE BROKE OUT IN A COLD SWEAT. IT WOULD HAVE TO BE THE PARACHUTISTS! WITH ANY LUCK, THE WAR MIGHT BE OVER BEFORE HE EVEN HAD TO MAKE A JUMP...

I'D LIKE TO STAY WITH THE REGIMENT, SIR, AND JOIN THE SECOND BATTALION IN NORMANDY.

YOU CAN PUT ME DOWN FOR THE PARATROOPERS, SIR.

I'LL TRANSFER TO AIRBORNE TOO, SIR.





## Battle Drop

CANDIDATES FOR THE AIRBORNE FORCES SPENT THEIR FIRST DAYS UNDER INSTRUCTION IN RIGOROUS PHYSICAL TRAINING, AND IN LEARNING HOW TO FALL SO AS TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF INJURY . . .



SYNTHETIC TRAINING OVER, THEY WORKED UP TO THEIR FIRST ACTUAL DESCENT FROM A PLANE. THIS WAS THE MOMENT KANE HAD DREADED . . .



A RED LIGHT GLOWED. IT MEANT ACTION STATIONS. THE ORDER CAME TO STAND UP AND HOOK UP, THEN TO CHECK EQUIPMENT. THE TRAINEES BEGAN TO SHUFFLE TOWARDS THE JUMPING HOLE . . .



CLOSE TO WHERE THE DISPATCHER STOOD, THE RED LIGHT GLOWING IN ITS BOX CHANGED TO GREEN. THE DISPATCHER RAPPED OUT A WORD OF COMMAND. THE FIRST MAN DROPPED . . .



ONE AFTER ANOTHER THE TRAINEES VANISHED THROUGH THE APERTURE, PARACHUTES OPENING AUTOMATICALLY TO THE TUG OF STATIC LINES. THEN MATT KANE'S TURN CAME . . .



## Battle Drop

VERTIGO SEIZED HIM IN ITS GRIP. HIS BRAIN WENT NUMB. HE NEVER KNEW WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NEXT INSTANT — WHETHER HE WENT OUT OF HIS OWN ACCORD IN A SEMI-SWOON OR WAS PRODDED BY THE MAN BEHIND HIM. BUT SUDDENLY HE WAS PLUNGING THROUGH SPACE . . .



FOR AWFUL SECONDS THAT SEEMED AN ETERNITY, HE PLUMMETED WILDLY, THE BLAST OF THE AIRCRAFT'S SLIPSTREAM STIFLING THE SCREAM THAT ROSE TO HIS LIPS. THEN HIS 'CHUTE OPENED WITH A JERK, TUGGING AT HIS SHOULDERS . . .



HE FLOATED EARTHWARD IN A GENTLE, FEATHERY DESCENT. HIS PALPITATING FEAR LEFT HIM, SUBMERGED IN A FEELING OF IMMENSE RELIEF. HE SAVOURED THE PLEASURABLE SENSATION OF DRIFTING THROUGH THE VOID . . .





MATT KANE LANDED, FELT THE FINAL BOUNCE. HE COLLAPSED HIS PARACHUTE AS HE HAD BEEN TAUGHT, AND A FEW MINUTES LATER WAS JOINED BY TWO OF HIS FELLOW-TRAINEES...



MATT KANE HAD DONE FIVE JUMPS WHEN HE WAS POSTED TO A BATTALION IN THE FIRST AIRBORNE DIVISION. PUT IN CHARGE OF A SECTION, HE SOON LEARNED THE MEN IN IT WERE OLD HANDS, BATTLE-EXPERIENCED...



## Battle Drop

OUT TO IMPRESS, AND EAGER TO COURT POPULARITY, MATT GAVE HIS OWN VERSION OF THE ACTION IN WHICH HE HAD FIGURED. A SERGEANT, WHO WAS PASSING, STOPPED TO LISTEN ...



SERGEANT BILL HENDERSON FROWNED. HE WAS A STRICT DISCIPLINARIAN, THOUGH FAIR-MINDED AND WELL-LIKED BY THE MEN IN THE PLATOON TO WHICH KANE'S SECTION BELONGED ...



HENDERSON WAS ALSO A SHREWD JUDGE OF CHARACTER, AND HE HAD NOT MUCH CARED FOR WHAT HE HAD OVERHEARD ...

THIS NEW CORPORAL'S RECORD IS WORTH WHILE BY ALL ACCOUNTS. BUT HE SOUNDS LIKE A LINE-SHOOTER TO ME.

ANYTHING WRONG?



AN OMINOUS GLINT APPEARED IN HENDERSON'S EYE . . .

CORPORAL, WE PRIDE OURSELVES ON OUR DISCIPLINE HERE. FIRST, YOU'LL ADDRESS ME AS SERGEANT WHEN YOU SPEAK TO ME. SECONDLY, I DON'T WANT TO HEAR THE MEN IN YOUR SECTION CALLING YOU BY YOUR FIRST NAME AT ANY TIME. UNDERSTOOD?



THE FOLLOWING WEEKS WERE SPENT IN INTENSIVE TRAINING. MORE THAN ONCE HENDERSON FOUND FAULT WITH MATT'S HANDLING OF HIS SECTION. HE FELT IT NECESSARY TO EXPRESS HIS DOUBTS TO LIEUTENANT ADAMS, THE PLATOON COMMANDER . . .

KANE PUT UP ANOTHER POOR SHOW ON THE PLATOON-IN-ATTACK EXERCISE WE'VE JUST CARRIED OUT, SIR. HE DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE A GOOD SECTION LEADER.

HE CAME TO US WITH A FINE RECOMMENDATION FROM HIS OLD REGIMENT, SERGEANT. WE'LL PERSEVERE WITH HIM. MAYBE HE'S FINDING IT HARD TO SETTLE DOWN.





## Battle Drop

MATT KANE AT THAT MOMENT WAS UNEASY IN MIND, BUT NOT BECAUSE HE HAD FAILED TO MAKE HIS MARK AS A SECTION LEADER. HE WAS LISTENING NERVOUSLY TO WHAT TWO MEN IN HIS FILE WERE SAYING . . .

SOMETHING BIG'S BREWING UP. THAT'S THE TALK, ANYWAY. NOBODY KNOWS WHAT, BUT THEY SAY THE SICILY DROP WILL SEEM LIKE A PICNIC TO WHAT WE'RE IN FOR.

SUITS ME. I'M CHEESED OFF WITH THESE BLINKING SCHEMES AND ROUTE MARCHES.



THE DAYS PASSED, EACH ONE BRINGING RUMOURS OF IMPENDING ACTION. FOR EVERY MAN THIS WAS A PERIOD OF TENSION - OF PULSING EXCITEMENT FOR MANY WHO WERE BATTLE-HUNGRY - BUT FOR MATT KANE, A TIME OF GNAWING ANXIETY. THEN CAME THE ORDER TO MOVE!

THIS IS IT, BOYS! WE'RE ON OUR WAY!

BUT WHERE TO? WE STILL DON'T KNOW.

LET'S HOPE THE JERRIES DON'T KNOW, EITHER!



THEIR IMMEDIATE DESTINATION WAS A CONCENTRATION AREA WHERE OTHER UNITS JOINED THEM. FROM THERE THEY WERE TAKEN IN DUE COURSE TO A NEARBY AIRFIELD . . .



THE OFFICERS HAD BEEN GIVEN DETAILS OF THE OPERATION. AT THE AIRFIELD, THE OTHER RANKS WERE BRIEFED . . .

THE INTENTION, MEN, IS TO LAUNCH AN AIRBORNE ASSAULT SIXTY MILES INSIDE ENEMY-HELD TERRITORY. IT COULD SHORTEN THE WAR BY MANY MONTHS..



THE MAIN TASK IN THE OPERATION, CODE-NAMED MARKET GARDEN, WAS TO SECURE THE CROSSING OF THE NEDER RHINE RIVER AT A LITTLE TOWN IN NAZI-OCCUPIED HOLLAND. THE NAME OF THAT TOWN — *ARNHEM* . . .

WE WILL SEIZE THE BRIDGE AT ARNHEM AND HOLD IT AT ALL COSTS FOR FORTY-EIGHT HOURS, GIVING THE BRITISH SECOND ARMY TIME TO FIGHT ITS WAY FORWARD AND LINK UP WITH US .



THE PARATROOPERS PREPARED FOR TAKE-OFF. THEY WERE WALKING ARSENALS, BURDENED WITH ALL THEIR USUAL EQUIPMENT AND AMMO, PLUS ITEMS LIKE GAMMON GRENADES, "HAND ARTILLERY" POWERFUL ENOUGH TO BLOW THE ROOF OFF A HOUSE . . .

WITH THIS LOAD UP, SARN'T, I'LL GO STRAIGHT THROUGH THE GROUND AND END UP IN AUSTRALIA IF MY 'CHUTE DON'T OPEN!

CUT OUT THE CHATTER, KYLE. LOOK SLIPPY AND GET THAT VALISE HUNG ACROSS YOUR CHEST. WE'RE DUE OFF ANY MINUTE .





IT WAS SEPTEMBER 17. THE DAY HAD DAWNED MISTILY, BUT WAS GOLDEN AS PARACHUTISTS AND GLIDER TROOPS OF THE DIVISION MARCHED TO WAITING AIRCRAFT — DAKOTAS AND MORSAS GLIDERS. BULKIER HAMILCAR GLIDERS HELD THE HEAVIER GEAR SUCH AS ANTI-TANK GUNS, JEEPS . . .

UP THE RED BERETS!  
THAT'S IT, MATE — CHALK IT  
GOOD AND BIG SO THE  
JERRIES CAN READ IT  
A MILE OFF.



THE MOTORS WERE WARMING UP. THE MASSED SOUND OF THEM SWELLED TO A DEAFENING ROAR. THE PROPELLERS WHIPPED CLOUDS OF DUST FROM THE AIRFIELD'S SURFACE . . .

THERE THEY  
GO! GOOD LUCK  
TO 'EM.

WHERE THEY'RE  
GOING THEY'LL  
NEED IT!

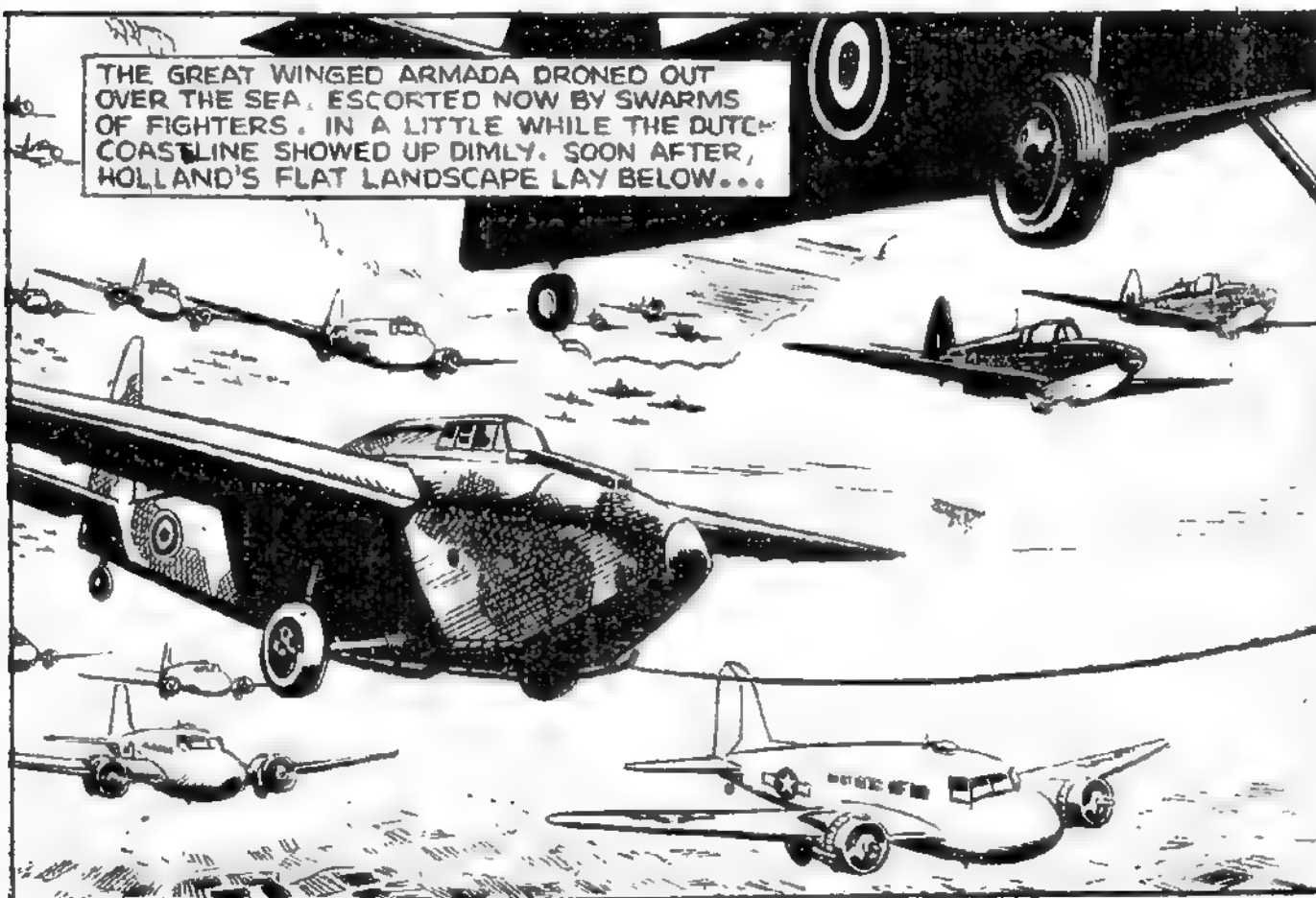


*Chapter 3***ARNHEM**

THE AIRCRAFT TOOK OFF AND MANOEUVRED INTO PRE-ARRANGED BATTLE ORDER IN THE SKY. AT LAST THEY HEADED EAST, CARRYING THE GRIM ACCESSORIES OF WAR AND MEN WHO HAD SUDDENLY BECOME SILENT AND TIGHT-LIPPED.



THE GREAT WINGED ARMADA DRONED OUT OVER THE SEA, ESCORTED NOW BY SWARMS OF FIGHTERS. IN A LITTLE WHILE THE DUTCH COASTLINE SHOWED UP DIMLY. SOON AFTER, HOLLAND'S FLAT LANDSCAPE LAY BELOW...



AT FIRST THERE WAS NO SIGN OF OPPOSITION. FOR TWENTY-FOUR HOURS PREVIOUSLY, ALLIED BOMBERS HAD POUNDED GERMAN FLAK BATTERIES. BUT ALL AT ONCE FLASHES OF FLAME SPRANG UP AT GROUND-LEVEL SOME DISTANCE AHEAD . . .



IN ARNHEM, DUTCH CITIZENS WATCHED THE APPROACHING AIRCRAFT WITH MINGLED HOPE AND ANXIETY . . .



THE SKY IS FILLED WITH THEM! THIS COULD MEAN AN ALLIED INVASION! FRIENDS, IT MAY NOT BE LONG BEFORE OUR COUNTRY IS FREED FROM THE GERMANS!

MAYBE NOT. BUT MEANTIME I AM TAKING MY WIFE AND CHILDREN TO THE SAFETY OF MY CELLAR! LISTEN, THE GUNS NEAR THE BRIDGE ARE FIRING!



## Battle Drop

ONE GERMAN BATTERY HAD ESCAPED THE ALLIED BOMBING — BECAUSE IT WAS CLOSE TO ARNHEM'S VITAL ROAD BRIDGE, WHICH HAD TO BE SEIZED INTACT. THIS BATTERY WAS IN ACTION NOW . . .



ONE OF THE LEADING DAKOTAS ROCKED VIOLENTLY IN THE SHOCK-WAVE OF A NEAR-MISS . . .



INSIDE THE PLANE, MEN WERE FLUNG TOGETHER IN A HEAP...



WE'VE HAD IT! WE'RE DONE FOR!

LOOK OUT, CORPORAL! GET YOUR FOOT OUT OF MY FACE!

THE PILOT TRIMMED THE DAKOTA, RIGHTING HER ON HER COURSE AGAIN. AS THE SHAKEN PARATROOPERS SCRAMBLED UP, THEY SAW A FLAK FRAGMENT HAD CUT THE OVERHEAD ANCHOR CABLE...



A GOOD THING NOBODY WAS MAKING HIS DROP WHEN THAT CABLE SNAPPED! FAT LOT OF USE HIS STATIC LINE WOULD'VE BEEN TO HIM THEN!

# Battle Drop

THE CABLE WAS RE-RIGGED. STATIC LINES WERE HOOKED TO IT AS THE RED WARNING LIGHT GLOWED. THE LIGHT CHANGED TO GREEN. THE MEN BEGAN SHUFFLING TO THAT GAPING DOORWAY — AND THERE MATT KANE BAULKED FEARFULLY!

WHAT'S HOLDING YOU UP, CORPORAL? WE'LL MISS THE DROPPING ZONE!



A NUDGE IN THE BACK PITCHED MATT FORWARD. FOR A MOMENT HIS HEART STOPPED BEATING AS HE THOUGHT HIS 'CHUTE WAS NOT GOING TO OPEN. THEN HIS MOMENTUM CHECKED AND HE WAS SWINGING IN THE SKY — AMONG THE FLAK!



AS HE SANK BELOW THE LINE OF THE SHELL-FIRE, HE BREATHED A PRAYER OF THANKS. BUT THEN MACHINE-GUN BULLETS WERE CRACKLING VICIOUSLY THROUGH THE AIR. A PARACHUTIST NEARBY SQUIRMED IN HIS HARNESS...





MATT WHIMPERED AT THE PROSPECT OF SHARING THE OTHER MAN'S FATE BUT HE TOUCHED DOWN UNHARMED AMONGST OTHER MEN OF HIS SECTION . . .

SECTION LEADERS,  
GET YOUR MEN UNDER  
CONTROL AND TAKE UP  
FIRING POSITIONS! BUT  
DON'T BUNCH!



SUDDENLY THE STACCATO CLATTER OF A FAST-FIRING SPANDAU SENT MEN DIVING FOR WHAT SCANT COVER THEY COULD FIND. BUT LIEUTENANT ADAMS WAS NOT QUICK ENOUGH . . .



## Battle Drop

THE OFFICER WAS DEAD — AND SERGEANT HENDERSON QUICKLY TOOK COMMAND. IN SECONDS, THE PLATOON'S MORTAR WAS LAYING DOWN A SMOKE-SCREEN . . .



HENDERSON LED THE ASSAULT PARTY IN A HEADLONG DASH. MATT KANE, GLAD TO STAY WHERE HE WAS, ADDED THE CHATTER OF HIS STEN TO THE BRENS AND RIFLES OF THE MEN GIVING FIRE-SUPPORT . . .





LUNGING THROUGH THE SMOKE, HENDERSON AND HIS MEN CAME ON THE TWO GERMANS. THE SPANDAU'S BARREL SWIVELLED VENOMOUSLY, BUT TOO LATE . . .

DESULTORY FIRING WAS GOING ON AT OTHER POINTS ROUND THE BATTALION DROPPING ZONE. IT SOON CEASED, AND A START WAS MADE FOR ARNHEM, STILL A FEW MILES OFF . . .

THAT CAR COPPED A PACKET FROM SOME OF THE LADS UP FRONT, AND NO MISTAKE !

LOOKS LIKE A GENERAL HANGING OUT OF IT. SHOWS THE JERRIES DIDN'T EXPECT US, WHEN ONE OF THEIR HIGH-UPS GETS KNOCKED OFF OUT HERE ON THE OPEN ROAD.





## Battle Drop

SURE ENOUGH, THE GERMANS HAD BEEN TAKEN BY SURPRISE. BUT, UNLUCKILY FOR THE PARATROOPERS, POWERFUL ENEMY FORCES HAD LATELY CHANCED TO CONCENTRATE NEAR ARNHEM FOR REST AND REFITMENT. FIRST INDICATION OF SERIOUS RESISTANCE WAS A SALVO OF MORTAR BOMBS...



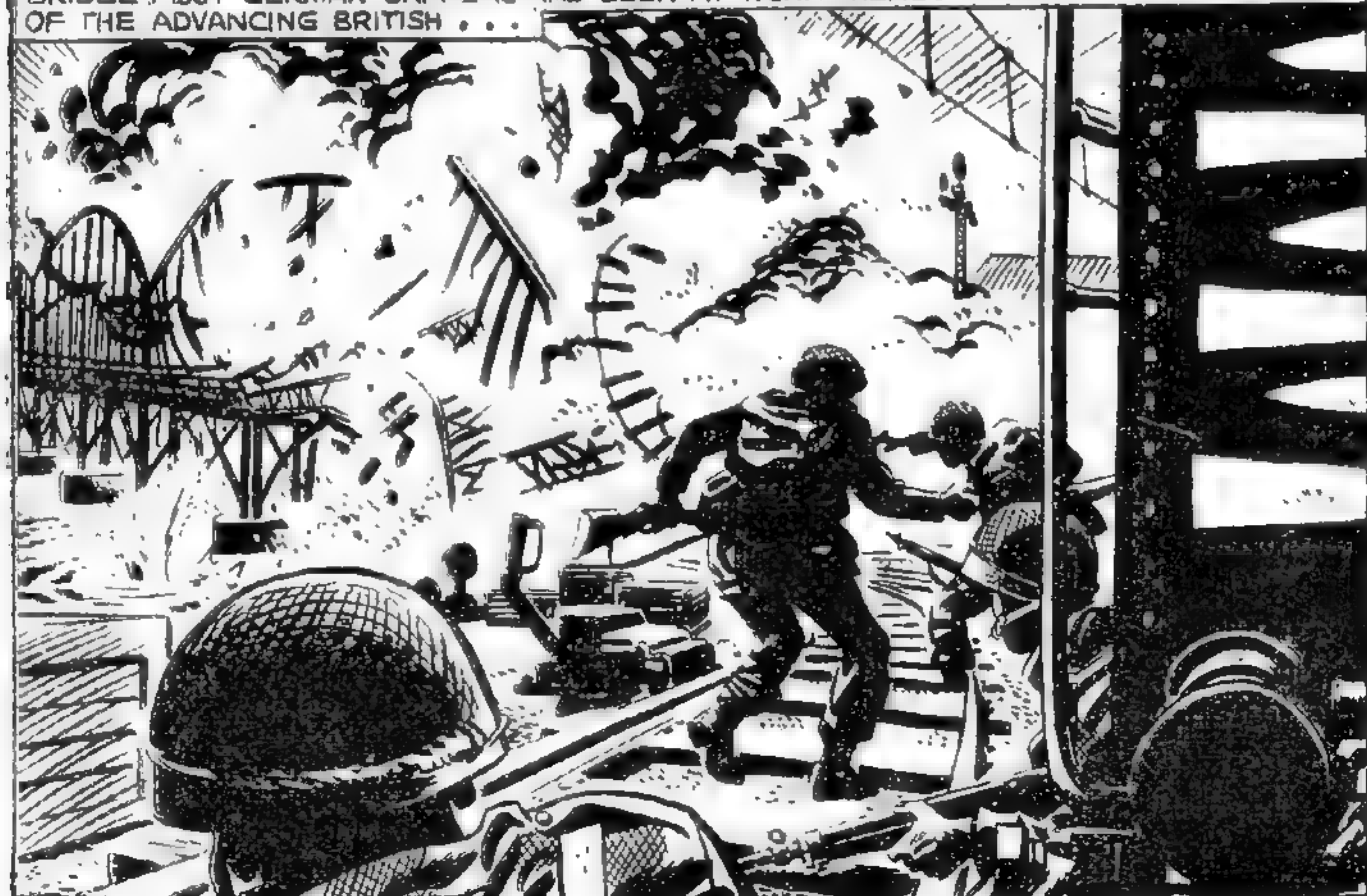
AGAINST STIFFENING OPPOSITION, THE BRITISH FOUGHT THEIR WAY FORWARD. SERGEANT HENDERSON, ACTING PLATOON COMMANDER, WAS GIVEN THE TASK OF CLEARING A WOOD...



THE GRENADE HURTLED TOWARDS ITS TARGET - HIT HOME - BURST WITH A BLINDING FLASH AND A REPORT LIKE THE CRACK OF DOOM . . .



AT LENGTH THE TOWN WAS REACHED . A DETACHMENT MOVED AGAINST THE RAILWAY BRIDGE . BUT GERMAN SAPPERS HAD BEEN AT WORK THERE . IT BLEW UP IN THE FACES OF THE ADVANCING BRITISH . . .



## Battle Drop

DUSK WAS SETTLING AS ANOTHER PARTY DREW IN SIGHT OF THE MORE VITAL ROAD BRIDGE.

THE ROAD BRIDGE — AND ENEMY TRANSPORT MOVING SOUTH OVER IT, OUT OF THE TOWN! IF THE BATTALION COMMANDER GIVES THE WORD IT'S OURS FOR THE TAKING!



THE WORD WAS GIVEN, THE BRIDGE RUSHED. GERMAN TROOPS STATIONED THERE FLED AFTER ONLY A TOKEN RESISTANCE... THE FIRST AIRBORNE DIVISION'S MAIN OBJECTIVE WAS SECURED!





THEN THE ENEMY HIT BACK. GERMAN ARMOUR WAS RUSHED UP FROM THE SOUTH TO RECAPTURE THE BRIDGE BUT BRITISH ANTI-TANK GUNS AND PIATS HAMMERED THE POWERFUL JUGGERNAUTS . . .



TANK AFTER TANK BLEW UP AS SHELL OR PIAT BOMB BLUDGEONED INTO IT. FEW AMONG THAT ENEMY FORMATION ESCAPED . . .



THEN CRACK S.S. TROOPS CAME SURGING THROUGH THE TOWN TO ATTACK THE NORTH END OF THE BRIDGE . . .



FROM THE ROOF-TOPS AND WINDOWS OF BUILDINGS NEARBY, PARATROOPERS CUT DOWN THE GERMANS WITH A CONCENTRATED FIRE FROM RIFLES AND AUTOMATIC WEAPONS . . .



THE ENEMY ONSET IN THAT QUARTER WAS SMASHED WITHIN MINUTES. THE SURVIVING GERMANS TURNED TAIL OR SCRAMBLED FOR COVER. THE STREET EMPTIED EXCEPT FOR THE DEAD AND DYING . . .



MANY OF THE S.S. MEN HAD TAKEN SHELTER CLOSE BY AND HENDERSON LED HIS PLATOON FROM THEIR ROOF-TOP EYRIE TO DEAL WITH THEM . . .

KANE! GO TO GROUND WITH YOUR SECTION AND PLASTER THOSE WINDOWS WHERE THE ENEMY'S FIRE IS COMING FROM! COME ON, LAD— MOVE!





## Battle Drop

KANE WAS ONLY TOO READY TO GO TO GROUND! HE BABBLLED A FIRE ORDER TO HIS SECTION, AND HOT LEAD SLASHED INTO THE REAR WINDOWS OF THE HOUSE AHEAD...



BILL HENDERSON HEADED A RUSH FOR THE BACK DOOR—RAMMED IT WIDE OPEN WITH HIS BOOT—THEN JUMPED BACK AS A MACHINE-PISTOL PUMPED BULLETS AT HIM.



THE SERGEANT PULLED THE PIN OF A MILLS GRENADE. HE LET GO THE FIRING-LEVER, COOLLY COUNTED OUT THE HAIR-RAISING SECONDS WHILE THE FUSE BURNED LOW...



THE GRENADE EXPLODED DEAFENINGLY IN THE CONFINED SPACE AND A LURID FLASH OF FLAME LIT THE DARK INTERIOR OF THE ROOM . . .



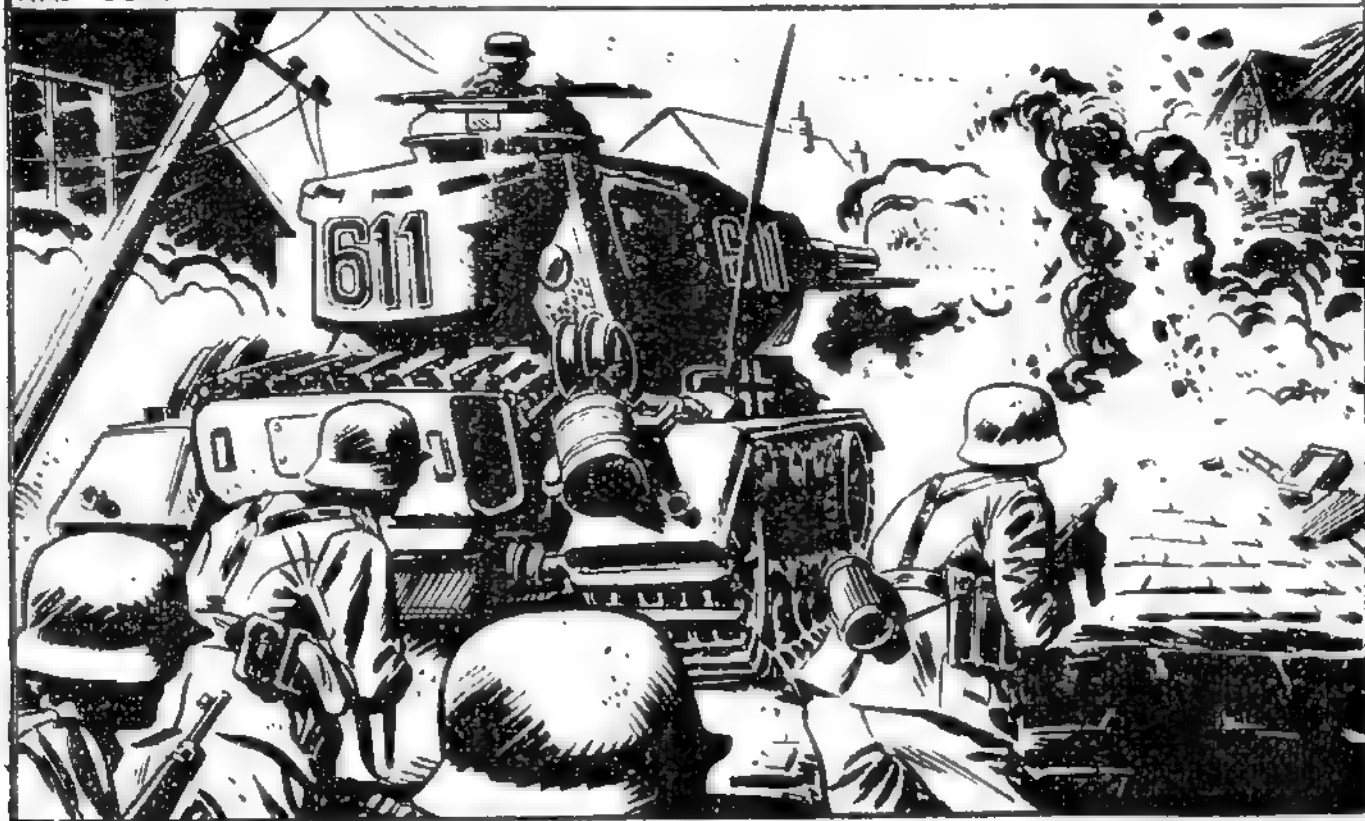
THE PARATROOPERS CHARGED IN THROUGH THE SWIRLING FUMES AND OVER HUDDLED BODIES. THEY RANGED THROUGH THE HOUSE, MOPPING UP OTHER S.S. MEN TILL IT WAS CLEAR OF ENEMIES . . .

YOU BLOKES MISSED ALL THE FUN!

NEVER MIND THAT! WE HAVEN'T FINISHED YET! THERE'S MORE JERRIES COMING DOWN THE STREET—AND THIS TIME THEY'VE GOT A TANK WITH 'EM!



THE TANK'S GUN SWIVELLED TO BLAST AT A HOUSE WHERE OTHER BRITISH PARATROOPERS HAD JUST TAKEN POSSESSION . . .



HENDERSON PROMPTLY SNATCHED UP THE PIAT, THE LITTLE INFANTRY WEAPON WHOSE BOMB CARRIED A PUNCH OUT OF ALL RATIO TO ITS SIZE. BUT IT WAS HARD TO DRAW A BEAD ON THE TANK FROM THE HOUSE . . .



I'LL TAKE A STAB AT THAT TANK FROM THE STREET! KANE, HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO HELP ADD TO THAT MACHINE-GUN EXPLOIT OF YOURS IN ITALY! GRAB THE BOMBS FROM LOGAN AND COME WITH ME!

THE BLOOD CURDLED IN MATT'S VEINS. HE SHRANK BACK, APPALLED AT THE IDEA OF GOING OUT TO FACE THAT ARMoured MONSTER . . .



NO! YOU CAN'T ASK ME TO DO THAT! I'M—I'M NOT GOING . . .

WHAT THE BLAZES ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? THAT TANK UP THERE IS SLAUGHTERING OUR BOYS! WE'VE GOT TO STOP IT—AND QUICK!

ALL AT ONCE DRY-MOUTHED WORDS CAME TUMBLING FROM MATT KANE'S CONTORTED LIPS, WORDS BLABBED OUT IN THE EXTREMITY OF HIS FEAR . . .

I SHOULDN'T BE HERE WITH YOU! I WAS NEVER MEANT TO FIGHT! D'YOU KNOW WHAT *REALLY* HAPPENED IN ITALY? I LOST MY NERVE! I DID, I TELL YOU . . .



ALL SELF-CONTROL GONE, KANE BLURTED OUT THE TRUE STORY BEHIND HIS SUPPOSED VALOUR. THE OTHER MEN LOOKED SHEEPISH, EMBARRASSED, YET SOMEHOW SYMPATHETIC. EVEN HENDERSON, TOUGH, RUGGED, WAS NOT WITHOUT COMPASSION TOO . . .

ALL RIGHT, KANE! THIS IS A JOB THAT HAS TO BE DONE, BUT MAYBE IT CALLS FOR A VOLUNTEER . . .

I'LL - I'LL GO WITH YOU, SERGEANT.





LOADING UP WITH BOMBS, CORPORAL WILLIAMS FOLLOWED HENDERSON AS THE SERGEANT FLUNG HIMSELF FLAT IN THE STREET...



THE SERGEANT FIRED, BUT HIS TRAJECTORY WAS FAULTY. THE FIRST BOMB HIT THE ROADWAY GLANCINGLY, BOUNCED UP AND OVER THE TANK...



TOP-SPEED TEAMWORK AND A CHANGE OF AIM AVERTED CERTAIN DEATH FOR BILL HENDERSON AND WILLIAMS. THE SECOND BOMB PUNCHED INTO THE TANK, EXPLODING INSIDE WITH DEVASTATING EFFECT...



IT SLEWED SIDWAYS INTO A HOUSE-FRONT, JUDDERING BROKENLY TO A HALT...

WE GOT HER!  
BUT THE JERRIES ARE  
COMING ON! BACK TO  
THE HOUSE, WILLIAMS!



HENDERSON RAPIDLY POSTED HIS MEN IN DEFENSIVE POSITIONS THROUGHOUT THE DWELLING THEY HAD SEIZED. BUT THIS TIME THE GERMANS PRESSED HOME THEIR ATTACK...

THE JERRIES ARE  
IN THE HOUSE! IT'S  
ALL UP WITH US!  
IT'S ALL UP WITH  
US!



## Battle Drop

SCREAMING, KANE RUSHED INTO A ROOM GARRISONED BY HENDERSON AND SOME OF THE PLATOON. MOMENTARILY, HIS TERROR AFFECTED THE MEN AND HENDERSON SAW THAT HE HAD TO ACT FAST TO SMASH THE THREAT TO THEIR MORALE . . .



THE SERGEANT'S FIST FLATTENED KANE. NEXT SECOND HENDERSON WAS IN THE HALL, SPRAYING THE GERMANS WITH LEAD. STEADIED BY HIS RESOURCEFULNESS, HIS MEN SURGED AFTER HIM TO BACK HIM UP . . .



THE GERMANS WERE DRIVEN FROM THE HOUSE, AND FROM OTHER BUILDINGS TO WHICH THEY HAD WON THEIR WAY. WHEN MATT RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS THE SITUATION WAS UNDER CONTROL . . .



HENDERSON COULD NOT AFFORD TO SHOW COMPASSION NOW. HE HAD TO TAKE A TOUGH LINE TO COUNTERACT KANE'S DEMORALISING INFLUENCE ONCE AND FOR ALL . . .

I'M WARNING YOU, KANE! THE NEXT TIME YOU COME CLOSE TO STARTING A PANIC I'LL SHOW YOU NO MERCY! AND THE SAME GOES FOR ANY OTHER MAN THAT BREAKS!





## Chapter 4 THE SPARK OF COURAGE



AS CLOUDS TEMPORARILY OBSCURED THE MOON THE SERGEANT SLIPPED AWAY. WILLIAMS TURNED BACK FROM THE DOOR AND SAW MATT HOVERING IN THE SHADOWED HALL . . .



MATT OBEYED WITHOUT A WORD. HE WAS CORPORAL IN NAME ONLY NOW. HE HAD REVERTED TO THE ROLE OF A MAN WHO WAS MERELY TOLERATED BY HIS COMRADES...



AN HOUR PASSED, TWO HOURS. AT INTERVALS HE HEARD SHOOTING IN OTHER SECTORS. IT MADE HIM JUMPY. HE WAS ON EDGE WHEN HE DETECTED A MOVEMENT IN THE GLOOM...



THE MOON SWAM CLEAR OF THE CLOUDS, BATHING THE STREET IN ITS LIGHT, ABRUPTLY THE STEN CEASED ITS UGLY CHATTER AND A WILD CRY BROKE FROM MATT KANE - JUST AS MEN CAME RUNNING TO JOIN HIM...



HORROR FLARED IN THE EYES OF THE MAN CORPORAL WILLIAMS HAD ACCUSED . . .

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT! AN ACCIDENT, I TELL YOU! I—I THOUGHT HE WAS A JERRY!

YOU EXPECT US TO BELIEVE THAT?



WILLIAMS AND ANOTHER PARATROOPER DARTED FROM THE HOUSE. A FUSILLADE FROM THE END OF THE STREET CAUGHT THE TWO MEN BEFORE THEY COULD REACH HENDERSON . . .

YOU WERE JUST WAITING YOUR CHANCE TO GET EVEN WITH THE SERGEANT FOR WHAT HAPPENED A FEW DAYS AGO, WEREN'T YOU—YOU SKUNK? NOW WILLIAMS AND KNOBBY HAVE BOUGHT IT BECAUSE OF YOU! SHOOTING'S TOO GOOD FOR THE LIKES OF YOU, KANE!



MATT WAS NO STRANGER TO CONTEMPT. BUT IT WAS BITTER LOATHING HE SAW ON THE FACES OF THE MEN BESIDE HIM. IT FILLED HIM WITH A SHUDDERING DISMAY, TRANSCENDING HIS FEAR OF BATTLE . . .



HE WHIRLED ROUND AND FLUNG HIMSELF INTO THE STREET. IT WAS HYSTERIA, NOT COURAGE, THAT DROVE HIM HEADLONG THROUGH THE HAIL OF GERMAN BULLETS . . .





## Battle Drop

LUCK WAS WITH HIM IN HIS FRENZIED RUSH. CLOUDS DRIFTED ACROSS THE MOON AGAIN. SOBBING, HE CLAWED AT HENDERSON AND DRAGGED HIM TO THE HOUSE UNDER COVER OF THE DARKNESS . . .

IT—IT LOOKS LIKE  
ANOTHER FULL-SCALE ATTACK  
IS COMING IN — WITH MORE  
GERMAN ARMOUR!



HENDERSON WAS CARRIED TO A CELLAR UNDER THE HOUSE. AT HIS GASPED-OUT DIRECTIONS, WHILE THE OTHER MEN HURRIED TO THEIR POSTS, MATT DRESSED THE SERGEANT'S WOUNDS . . .

GET A MOVE ON,  
KANE! DON'T FUMBLE,  
MAN! WE'RE NEEDED UP  
THERE TO HELP FIGHT  
OFF THOSE JERRIES!



BUT ABOVE, GERMAN ARMOUR AND INFANTRY DIVERTED TO ARNHEM IN OVERWHELMING STRENGTH MOVED SWIFTLY, INEXORABLY INTO ACTION. UNDAUNTED, LOW IN AMMUNITION BUT HIGH IN MORALE, HEROIC GROUPS OF PARATROOPERS STEELED THEMSELVES TO FIGHT AGAINST FANTASTIC ODDS ...



THE HOUSE HELD BY THE REMNANTS OF HENDERSON'S PLATOON WAS WRECKED BY A SHELL FROM A SELF-PROPELLED GUN. A SECOND SHELL, FIRED AT POINT-BLANK RANGE, CRASHED INTO THE RUBBLE BEFORE IT HAD SETTLED ...



IN THE CELLAR, BILL HENDERSON AND MATT KANE HEARD THE THUNDER OF THAT UNEQUAL BATTLE ROLL ONWARD. THEY HEARD IT MOUNT TO A FURIOUS CRESCENDO AROUND THE BRIDGE, AND THEN GRADUALLY SUBSIDE . . .

I'D BE MORE  
HELP TO YOU WITHOUT  
THIS STEN, SERGEANT.  
I'LL DITCH IT —

YOU WON'T!  
YOU'LL HANG ON  
TO IT! WHAT'S  
MORE, YOU'LL BE  
READY TO USE IT IF  
NECESSARY! THAT'S  
AN ORDER, KANE!



THEY CLIMBED UP INTO THE SMOKING RUINS OF THE HOUSE WHERE THEIR COMRADES HAD DIED. AND SUDDENLY, CROUCHING THERE, THEY HEARD A SOUND AT WHICH THEY MARVELLED . . .

THEY'RE ALL THAT'S LEFT OF THE  
BATTALION — OF THE WHOLE BRIGADE! AND  
BY HEAVENS, THEY'RE SINGING! THEY'VE  
BEEN THROUGH MORE THAN ANY MEN  
COULD BE EXPECTED TO TAKE —  
AND THEY'RE SINGING!



TOUGH BILL HENDERSON COULD HAVE WEPT — BUT WITH PRIDE AT THE INDOMITABLE SPIRIT OF SUCH MEN! NO WONDER THE GERMANS THEMSELVES FELT AWE AND RESPECT.

THEY FOUGHT LIKE DEVILS TILL  
THEY HAD NOTHING LEFT TO FIGHT  
WITH. THEY ARE EXHAUSTED, MOST  
OF THEM WOUNDED . . . YET THEY  
CAN SING! I BEGIN TO THINK WE  
ARE THE ONES WHO HAVE BEEN  
DEFEATED IN THIS BATTLE!



THE VALOROUS DEFENDERS OF ARNHEM'S BRIDGE PASSED BY. HENDERSON AND MATT KANE STOLE FROM THE RUINS OF THE HOUSE . . .

THERE'S HEAVY FIGHTING STILL GOING ON WEST OF HERE, FROM THE SOUND OF IT. THAT'S THE DIRECTION OF OOSTERBECK, OUR DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS. WE'LL MAKE FOR THERE, KANE.



MATT SCARCELY HEARD HIM. HIS MIND WAS BACK WITH WHAT HE HAD SEEN A LITTLE WHILE AGO . . .

I KEEP THINKING ABOUT THOSE LADS OF OURS. THE WAY THEY STILL HAD THEIR CHINS UP . . . I WISH I HAD THEIR GUTS. I ONLY WISH I COULD BE LIKE THEM . . .

WISHING IT MAY BE YOUR FIRST STEP TO BEING LIKE THEM, KANE. I WOULDN'T KNOW.





## Battle Drop

PAINFULLY, WITH MATT'S AID, THE SERGEANT HOBBOLED TOWARDS AN ALLEY ON THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE OF THE STREET. THEY HAD ALMOST REACHED IT WHEN THREE GERMANS CAUGHT SIGHT OF THEM . . .



THE TWO BRITISHERS DIVED INTO THE ALLEY. HENDERSON LOST HIS BALANCE IN THE EFFORT, AND FELL. A SHOT RANG OUT, AND KANE'S IMPULSE WAS TO RUN FOR IT AND SAVE HIS OWN SKIN . . .





HE FIRED IN SHORT BURSTS, THE STEN JUDDERING IN HIS FEVERISH HANDS, THE ECHOES IN THAT NARROW SPACE BATTERING AT HIS EAR-DRUMS . . .



## Battle Drop

SHOUTS AROSE CLOSE BEHIND THEM. FEAR AGAIN LAID ITS CHILL CLUTCH ON MATT'S THUDDING HEART. BUT HE STOPPED TO REACH DOWN FOR BILL HENDERSON . . .



THE SERGEANT SAID NOTHING. HIS SILENCE WAS MORE ELOQUENT THAN WORDS COULD HAVE BEEN. HE STUMBLED THROUGH THE ALLEY WITH KANE, ONE LEG DRAGGING . . .



THE DUTCHMAN WAS RISKING HIS VERY LIFE BUT THEY COULD NOT AFFORD TO REFUSE HIS OFFER OF SHELTER. THE TWO MEN STRUGGLED ACROSS TO HIS HOUSE AND HE SWIFTLY ADMITTED THEM . . .



THEY WAITED TILL THE HUE AND CRY HAD DIED DOWN. THEN THE FRIENDLY DUTCHMAN GUIDED THEM CAUTIOUSLY THROUGH A MAZE OF TURNINGS TO A STRETCH OF THE RIVER...

GOOD LUCK, MY FRIENDS.



SLOWLY, LABORIOUSLY, THEY FOLLOWED THE RIVER'S WINDINGS TOWARDS THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE. ONCE THEY HEARD ARMOUR ON A ROAD NEARBY — AND ONCE, MEN DIGGING-IN A FEW YARDS FROM THE BANK...

NOT MUCH FARTHER TO GO NOW. IF WE CAN GET PAST THIS LOT WITHOUT THEM SEEING US, WE'LL MAKE IT!





## Battle Drop

WITH BATED BREATH THEY WORMED ONWARD ALONG THE BANK. TWICE HENDERSON HAD TO REST, CURSING THE PAIN IN HIS LEG. THEN, SUDDENLY, A HOARSE CHALLENGE BROUGHT THEM UP SHORT WITH THEIR HEARTS IN THEIR MOUTHS...



THEY HAD REACHED THE PERIMETER OF THE BRITISH DEFENCE LINE, WHERE ALL THAT REMAINED OF THE FIRST AIRBORNE DIVISION WERE KEEPING HORDES OF ENEMY TROOPS AT BAY...



THE END WAS NEAR IN A BATTLE THE WORLD WOULD HAIL AS ONE OF THE MOST GLORIOUS EPISODES IN BRITISH MILITARY HISTORY. ON THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 25TH. THE SURVIVORS OF THE DIVISION BEGAN THE WITHDRAWAL...



MATT KANE MARCHED IN THAT COLUMN, FLINCHING AT THE SHRAPNEL THAT BURST OVERHEAD, YET WITH A FIRMER STEP THAN HE HAD EVER SHOWN BEFORE...



## Battle Drop

SERGEANT HENDERSON WAS OF THAT COLUMN, TOO, WITH HIM THAT NIGHT WAS AN OFFICER OF HIS BATTALION WHO HAD ALSO SUCCEEDED IN EVADING CAPTURE . . .



I SEE KANE GOT AWAY AS WELL. HOW'D HE MAKE OUT AFTER ALL? LAST TIME I SAW YOU AT BATTALION HEADQUARTERS YOU SAID HE'D SUNK PRETTY LOW.

BILL HENDERSON ANSWERED BRIEFLY, BUT FEELINGLY. HE HAD ALWAYS COUNTED HIMSELF A FAIR JUDGE OF MEN. HE WAS BACKING HIS JUDGMENT NOW. . .

HE SANK PRETTY LOW, SURE ENOUGH. HE JUST ABOUT REACHED BOTTOM, BUT I THINK HE'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT. YES, HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT NOW, SIR. . .



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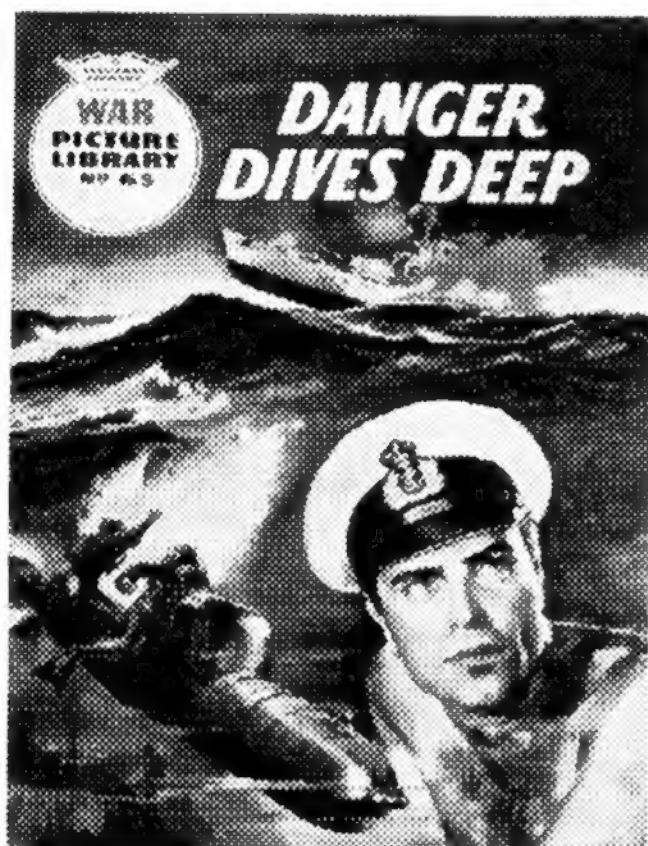


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